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Political Platforms

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As conflict mounts on Cularin, a citizens' meeting discusses the problems and benefits of the planet's platform cities. The governor, a Tarasin, a Bothan from Thaere, and other prominent individuals make themselves heard, while none other than Yara Grugara moderates the event. Our latest supplement to the Living Force campaign ties in to the scenario "Lockdown on Soboll."

As conflict mounts on Cularin, a meeting of the citizenry of Gadrin and Hedrett is convened. Initially, all is chaos. Then, several prominent individuals make themselves heard, including: Karid Blakken; Counselor Westa Impeveri's current aide-de-camp, a Sakiyan named Brug D'Shar; Governor Barnab Chistor of Gadrin; a Tarasin who calls herself Kaguya; Vanster Enan, Ithorian owner of the?Sop House? chain of cantinas on Cularin; and Mirt, a Bothan who claims to have immigrated from Thaere. These six, for a variety of reasons, were called to the front of the meeting to address their concerns. The moderator for the event is none other than Yara Grugara.

Yara: If I could have your attention please. Your attention?

She pauses, looking out at the crowd gathered in one of the big empty hangars of the Hedrett groundport. The crowd, restless from whatever discussion has gone before, continues to simmer as Yara waits. Slowly, the murmur settles to a sustained (if barely perceptible) communal whisper.

Yara: Thank you. I think that you'll all agree that the previous form of our dialogue really wasn't getting us anywhere. Yara - - and everyone on this makeshift stage, which frankly looks like it's going to fall down at any moment - - thanks you. What we'd like to do is allow the half-dozen individuals who seemed to have so much to say that none of the rest of you could get a word in to discuss things in a more civilized environment. That's the idea, at least. Plus, with Yara as a moderator, we know that there will at least be someone else speaking from time to time.

Voice from crowd: How about someone else shutting up, every once in a while?

The communal whisper rises in volume and then settles back once more to its dull baseline.

Yara: I'm not interested in talking, actually. The panel has much more to say on this than Yara. So, the topic: How important are the platform cities to Cularin, and what should be done with them?

She takes a seat to one side of the front of the stage, folding her hands

in her lap. For several seconds, the six panelists who are seated in uncomfortable metal chairs at a long table look at one another, then at the audience.

Blakken: Right. If nobody else is going to say it, I will. The platform cities are a drain on the economy and a problem for the planet. We should pull out of the jungles and not disturb anything else.

A smattering of applause. The Tarasin panelist nods her head, but doesn't speak.

D'Shar: Mr. Blakken is clearly confused. From a logistical perspective, there is no way to do as he suggests. Cularin is simply too populous for any kind of withdrawal from the platform cities to be practical, and if he had any legitimate experience in Cularin politics, he would know this.

Blakken: Legitimate experience? I'm not the one who helped engineer a fraudulent election, wampa-breath!

D'Shar holds up his hands and shakes his head, a classic gesture of?Heard it all before.?

Blakken: Look, I'm not here to talk about how his boss lied, cheated, and stole to obtain office. I'm past the point where I care. Counselor Impeveri's done a reasonable job since he took office, and I had no intention of bringing up the fraud when I sat down here. But if someone else wants to make an issue of it to distract us from the matter at hand, well, I can't be held responsible.

More than a little applause from the audience. It seems that Blakken - - the last individual to challenge Impeveri for the counsellorship - - still has some supporters on Cularin.

Chistor: I think the points Mr. Blakken and Mr. D'Shar make both have merit, which only makes the dilemma more of a challenge.

D'Shar: Both have merit? If you can't take a stand, you are a mealy-tongued politician who has nothing whatsoever to contribute to the discussion. To be perfectly blunt - - shut up.

Chistor: I will not. I said that both have merit, not that both are right. Counselor Impeveri's hiring skills seem to have deteriorated significantly if he's chosen you as his mouthpiece. No, don't bother trying to respond, my friend. I'm going to make my point, and then you can say what you will. The argument that the platform cities are a drain on Cularin's economy is a valid one. No platform, early in its existence, is self-sufficient. The amount of traffic into and out of any city of reasonable size is such that they can either be profitable or well supplied. Not both. The point of building cities on platforms was that we could expand settlements on Cularin without damaging the natural beauty of the planet.

D'Shar rolls his eyes. The others watch Chistor as though hoping he may eventually say something interesting.

Chistor: The problem is that our attempts at being environmentally

friendly are a drain on the land-bound settlements. I don't believe that Mr. D'Shar would disagree with me that Gadrin and Hedrett both shoulder some amount of burden to keep the platform cities operational. This groundport, for example, handles better than one-third of all the cargo traffic destined for the platforms.

D'Shar: Which means that the land-bound settlements, as you call them, actually benefit economically from the presence of the platform cities.

Chistor: That's both the counter-argument to my position and the best defense for my position. Yes, there is more traffic through Gadrin and Hedrett in order to supply the platform cities. But there is also a drain on our resources. The shippers and traders who come to Cularin only to drop off goods for the platform cities ultimately contribute little to the economy of our two cities, aside from landing fees and fuel costs.

Vanster Enan: I must respectfully disagree with Governor Chistor. My cantinas attest to the fact that these pilots do more than stop and fuel their ships. They fuel themselves as well! Double-dip Outer-Rim rumdrops! Yes, that is what they come to our cities for, and I tell you, they spend credits with us! My business would be decimated if we cut out the trade to the platform cities.

A weak chorus of?Hear, hear!? from the crowd.

D'Shar: There you have it. How can you continue to argue that the platform cities are bad for the economy?

Chistor: Because there is no evidence that taking away the trade to the platform cities would have the slightest effect on anyone's business. I don't say this to call Master Enan's word into question, but it does seem to me that he is speculating - - and perhaps engaging in a bit of hyperbole.?Decimated? seems rather strong. Still, I will grant that there are benefits as well, but those benefits are not nearly so great as they would be if, say, there were tariffs levied on goods that pass through Gadrin and Hedrett bound for the platform cities.

This seems to stop D'Shar in his tracks. He reaches into a pocket, pulls out a datapad, and types a quick message. Seconds later, the datapad clicks and beeps. D'Shar returns it to his pocket.

D'Shar: Ah. So it isn't necessarily that the platform cities hurt the economy, only that they do not provide the maximum possible benefit to the economy?

Chistor (glancing at the pocket where D'Shar's datapad now hides): Does your employer see a difference?

Blakken: Now I see why I lost that election. I'm not slimy enough.

D'Shar smiles. Before he can respond, Kaguya speaks.

Kaguya: I believe there are other important matters that relate to the platform cities. We must consider the impact they have on the animal and vegetable life on Cularin.

Mirt: Oh, muffle it, you bark-lover.

Some portion of the audience chuckles.

Kaguya: I will not. Someone must speak for the Tarasin. The platform cities are an encroachment on our home. The elder generation decided they were a good compromise when the off-worlders could be held back no longer, but the elder generation has been mistaken before. We are told that the platforms are minimally invasive. What does minimally invasive mean? It means that they sink enormous posts into the ground, in holes fifty meters deep, cutting through roots and good soil and destroying life, and then they put a platform above the trees, to block the light of the suns. This may not be bad for the economy, but this is bad for Cularin.

Mirt: Freak.

Kaguya: Go back to Thaere! Go shave the nerf-fur off your chin!

Yara: Could we keep this civil, please?

Mirt and Kaguya: No!

Kaguya: You are uncivilized and smell funny.

Mirt: You're a backward reptile.

Kaguya: You are strange and off-putting.

Mirt: You don't even write your own material, do you? A backward reptile from a backward world that can't even tell when it's being invaded.

This earns Mirt a round of Boos from the crowd, who seem increasingly agitated by him. He seems completely unconcerned.

Mirt: You want to talk problems with your platform cities? How about this? They provide a dozen different places for ships to land on your planet without having to pass through anything remotely like customs. How about the fact that you've had Thaereian military on your planet for years, coming and going as they please with no controls because they never needed to go through your major population centers? You let them come in and set up shop, and now we're all paying.

Nervous silence.

Chistor: That is regrettable.

D'Shar: Very.

Kaguya: Which leaves us needing to decide what to do about the platform cities. I say we dismantle them. We put the people of Cularin to work dismantling the platforms, and if we need platforms, we build levels upon levels in Gadrin and Hedrett. Why do you live in two-story cities, when the rest of the galaxy lives on thousand-story planets? Think of all the jobs that would be created by the dismantling of the platforms and the building of the

new levels!

Mirt: I think the lizard's got an idea there.

Vanster Enan: Will I need different permits for different levels?

Blakken: Making things more complex is not the way to fix this situation. We should pull out of the jungles and if there isn't room on Cularin, people should go elsewhere. You can always build another city on Genarius. You can't re-build a jungle. More complexity and technology on a world like Cularin is only going to lead to trouble. The Bothan was right the first time - - we're creating problems for ourselves and for future generations.

D'Shar: You still have no knowledge of politics. I will take this discussion back to Counselor Impeveri.

Chistor: Perhaps a referendum is in order.